Disrupting Church Service Counterproductive

I've only recently heard of the early November protest at Village 7 Presbyterian Church, and I'd like to share my thoughts, as the action raises issues fundamental to the question of how the gay community's struggle should proceed. I hope to demonstrate that the action was improper.

First, the action was morally wrong. It violated the sanctity of the worship service, a sanctity that all members of society are bound to respect. In so doing, the action violated the right of those present to engage in a religious observance free of intrusion. That right is inviolable; church members do not surrender it by taking political positions that others find odious.

The defense of the action that I have heard, that the participants "took a stand" against homophobia, is ultimately nothing more than an assertion that the ends justify the means. But this purported justification is, and has always been, empty, for it boundlessly sanctions injurious conduct, even horrors, on the basis of the actor's personal assessment of what constitutes the greater good. And while the defensive violence of the oppressed must be judged more leniently than the provocative violence of the oppressor, both must be judged.

Several years ago, nearly every tire on vehicles parked at the Hide & Seek and the Exit was slashed after a local radio talk show host allegedly gave the two establishments' addresses over the air and encouraged listeners to express their feelings. Joe Brady, the Hide & Seek's owner, later told me that, after the attack, a group was seen kneeling and praying on the sidewalk. No doubt those people also felt that their means, while perhaps sinful, were justified in the cause of combating homosexuality, to them the greater good.

Secondly, the church action was selfish. Any political action, it seems to me, stems from the motivation to remedy an injustice, the motivation to express anger at the existence of an injustice, or both. If an action is one that the majority of people will condemn, then undertaking the action does absolutely nothing to remedy the injustice (except perhaps causing a small, unquantifiable degree of enhanced public recognition of the existence of the grievance, doubtlessly overwhelmed by the force of the societal condemnation). Accordingly, such an action can only be understood as intended to express the participants' anger.

Reader's Forum

And here I assert a principle foundational to my thinking: that all gay activists act in trust for the gay community. Rightly or wrongly, the public at large holds the gay community responsible for the conduct of our activists. As such, gay activists are bound to honor the community's trust and to undertake only political actions that advance the cause of the community. Engaging in an action that harms that cause violates the trust. Doing so in order to achieve personal satisfaction can only be characterized as self indulgent.

Finally, the church action was harmful, for it perpetuated the cycle of distrust, anger and violence enchaining the gay community and the anti-gay forces. It does seem unfair that we, the people under siege, are called upon to break the cycle, but so called we are. Without our restraint, an honorable position in itself, the cycle will never end, and gay people will never be free, for freedom will come only with peace.

A luta continua,
Robin Miller ▼

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In the past few months many people have ex-